An ambitious project of this nature could not have happened without a lot of coordinating efforts. WordsFestZine would like to thank all of the WordsFest organizers, and in particular, Josh Lambier, of the Public Humanities Program at Western, and Brian Meehan, of Museum London. We would also like to thank the London Public Library for printing and distributing our promotional materials, and Kathleen Fraser, of Western’s English and Writing Studies, for facilitating student and faculty involvement in this project. Finally, to all of those who submitted their creative works for this Zine: thank you!

Cover artwork: untitled by Christopher Scott.
Welcome to WordsFestZine, an ‘instant’ publication born out of a partnership among Words, Poetry London, and Insomniac Press. Our goal with this zine was to capture the energy, dynamism, and diversity of Words Literary and Arts Festival by putting together a collection of reactions and responses to the festival, while it was happening. Our call was simple: Visit the Festival. Write About It. Get Published. We asked festival goers and our esteemed writers to send us poems, twitterverse, creative non-fiction and fiction pieces. These are not works “recollected in tranquility” — indeed, the ink may still be drying as you read this preface.

So how did we pull this off? With a team of tireless editors and producers working around the clock to edit, compile, design and, finally, print the zine within 24 hours of receiving the final submissions. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the participation of the public: this is London’s WordsFest; this is London’s WordsFestZine.

We have divided the WordsFestZine into 3 sections: “Happenings and Responses,” “Poetry OutLoud,” and “Heterogeneities and Rhinos.” The “Happenings and Responses” section contains pieces responding to and involved with events at the festival. “Poetry OutLoud” contains poems that were performed at the open mic night at the festival. And the “Heterogeneities and Rhinos” section contains the oddments and tidbits that collect around a major literary event.
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Contents

Happenings and Responses
Lincoln McCardle: “War of the Words” 3
Stefanie Tom: “Panel of Thought” 3
Frank Beltrano: “The Circus in in Town” 3
Heidi Choi: “Green” 4
Aileen House: “We Brought our Beloved Books” 4
Kym Wolfe: “Local Authors Book Fair” 5
Ola Nowosad: “In London Town” 5
Megan Gerrett: “Character Talk” 6
Laurie Graham: “Wearing the T-shirt” 6
Zoe Norman: “Some writers read their work in a way that is bizarre to me” 7
Megan Gerrett: “fem-i-nism” 7
Roy Geiger: “Take-aways” 8
Marilyn Ashworth: “Friday Night Festival Pulse” 8
Jennifer Zhang: “Haikus From a Street Corner” 8
Helen Ngo: “a pointwise stroll (amongst the stars)” 8
R.A. Robinson: “Unborn Not Here” 9
John Malik: “A landmark jutting prominently from the linoleum expanse” 9

Poetry OutLoud
Martin Hayter: “Writing in Snow” 11
Martin Hayter: “Anna Behind Bars” 11
Joan Clayton: “in hollow streets” 11
Shelly Harder: “plastic blossom” 12
Sara Raza: “Poem: A Forgotten Library (remembered only at exam time)” 12
Stan Burfield: “Then I Saw the Vatican” 13
Andy Verboom: “The Loosed Tongue” 14
Jennifer Chesnut: “Who praises silence?” 14

Heterogeneities and Rhinos
Jayme Archibald: “Palms as Poems” 16
Andy McGuire: “Heavy Metal Rhino” 16
Marlene Laplante: “rail trail ride” 16
Miriam Love: “Where it leads” 17
Tom Cull: “The Rhino Lounge” 17

Contributors 19
Happenings and Responses

War of the Words
Lincoln McCardle

The clicks of the keyboard cease replaced with a collective yawn.
The writing instruments stretch and the thin sheets sit unmolested and reflect.
Silence echoes.
Then a slow wave of quiet yet discordant sounds:
Sighs of amusement, the clinking of glasses, tittering, twittering and airings of delight.
The almost-palpable inactivity of marking coherent words on paper and the composition of text.
Suddenly a debate is sparked and an imagination ignited.
It is a celebration of the inkwell and may the ink be well celebrated!

Panel of Thought
Stefanie Tom

Intelligence embraced itself on the stage, Meaning personified, in words
Travelled through the vibrations, The black and white of the world was torn to shreds,
And in place, varying and wide hues of grey formed.

As the authors spoke, the chapters of life were illuminated.

The twinkling of truth laced and looped around their tongues.
And their messages:
You cannot reduce a person into a category of bad or good,
Writers are carpenters and words are their wood,
Light peeks its way in through our cracks,
Grey is much more realistic than white or black,
No matter how steady you are, gravity will still make you fall,
And most importantly, life’s about the moments: make sure to seize them all.

The Circus is in Town
Frank Beltrano

I have run off often to the circus am circled now by magicians bareback riders jugglers of balls and knives and fire. Some say it is just a word game to which fools aspire but I lust to be circled by the circus folk ’til my pen of many colours expires.
I think back to the place.  
With a green yard  
Green door  
Green garage  
Green sofa  
And a green mural across the wall of the  
parlour,  
My parents’ home stands tall and still.  
It hasn’t aged a bit –  
Unlike all of us, who have.  
My flat is my leverage  
The alibi that I carry in my back pocket  
Bragging rights  
About being a grown-up  
Up, up, up  
The elevator takes me up  
To the floor  
And down the hall I go  
To the door  
“363”  
I call it my apartment, but not  
Home.  
They say home is where your heart is,  
But my heart is here,  
(It moves in sync with campus conundrum)  
But it’s not my home –  
Not yet, anyway.  
Home is where everything is green.  
But I remember  
I signed up for adulthood.  
The alibi in my back pocket  
Tells me that the safe house 

That I grew up in  
Shouldn’t still be “my” home.  
Adulthood is a world of documents and  
signatures.  
Now, the green place is my “parents’ house.”  
Every time I leave  
My “parents’ house”  
I wish I could stay longer  
To relish and revel in  
That greenness  
That years ago I thought could be replaced  
With a greener green  
On the other side  
After moving out of “my parents’ house.”  
Maybe my contract should have warned me  
in fine print:  
Not a smidge of the apartment,  
None of it will be green.

We brought our beloved books  
Aileen House  

We brought our beloved books, our easy  
familiarity, our own best words to the corner  
in hopes of sharing our joys, labours and  
pleasures. I didn’t think about the notion of  
an us – readers and speakers – and a them –  
listeners and critics. I didn’t think about the  
privilege or the gifts. As the young man  
watched and heard, his hunger became  
obvious. Here is a man hungry for ideas,  
hungry for conversation, hungry for  
community. And to our potluck table he  
brought the magic. And we became us in the
process of moving closer to hear a voice unfamiliar with speaking to the spaces in the crowds. We became us in the gentle aid of pronunciation and diction. Today, courage is a dog-eared paperback in the front zipper pocket of a backpack. Never doubt that there is hunger and community. Never doubt that your pot is full, that you always have something to give and something to receive. There is always time, and an abundance of gratitude.

In London Town
Ola Nowosad

in London town
poets stand
at Covent Market

words fly like leaves, golden,
likening autumn mindscapes, red

one from a hundred years ago,
McCrae’s remembered verses

many battlefields, many wars later
still we bleed and still we mourn

sometimes on war or on longed-for peace,

Celebrate London! Celebrate the local authors who enrich our city because they MUST write just as they must breathe. It is a part of the DNA, an inborn yearning that pulls stories through hands and keyboards until they spill onto the written page to be consumed, savoured, chewed over and digested.

Aromas drift up from the food stalls below reminding me I must feed my rumbling belly. But my mind – ah, my mind – has been sated with ideas, emotions, fact and fiction. Listening to local authors read what they have concocted – that has been the true feast.
our words spoken aloud today
hover briefly, warrior-like
falcons in November wind

our written words wind on the page
like refugees lined up seeking home
propelled by hope
we read of red poppies, red roses, epic
pomegranates and ripe apples

the personal becomes the poetical
the political becomes the poetical

transformed are we by words
the chaos and beauty of language:
the desire to feed and feast on words
Wordsfest

like when they talked of books
and going—going there.

We don’t have to explore ourselves
if it’s more comfortable in an
empty, wooden chair.
But I like the discovery

of characters when they take on a new life;
and some are intimate,
and some are imaginary
friends.

Do they know us?
am I God to them?

Character Talk
Megan Gerrett

Kids sitting in the aisles,
excitement in the air,
faces—everywhere, everywhere
voices in the air.

But I don’t hear
anything exclusive, I don’t feel
like I’m not allowed here.

I see pens scribble, and it’s a different
atmosphere

Wearing the T-shirt
Laurie Graham

All day, words
banding chest,
bright font on dark
shirt, the unending of
words assessed, right
words for wages, the
bright false ones,
the ones uttered quiet
and phony to the cashier,
have you tried our
[insert words] on sale
this weekend, never mind all these
syllables, the clattering
language of traffic jam,
A reading is special because a group of people have gathered to experience writing as a group. Nothing more is necessary.

—Zoe Norman

Some writers read their work in a way that is bizarre to me

Zoe Norman

I didn’t notice this until I started attending readings, but some writers read their work in a way that is bizarre to me. They-string... their-words-together... in-a-totally-unnatural-way. I don’t know why they do this. Does anyone read like that naturally? Does anyone think like that? Beyond anything, it is incredibly distracting. It takes me a few minutes to get beyond how they read in order to actually pay attention to the content. I wonder what prompts them to read that way. Do they think it adds weight to their words or power to their phrasing? It is much braver for a writer to read their work in a natural way, to not hide behind a performance. If a writer is honest with their delivery, it makes their words more real, truer. It is representative of their braveness, to read their words as they wrote them, to not contort them to suit an idea of how a writer should sound. A reading is special because a group of people have gathered to experience writing as a group. Nothing more is necessary.

fem-i-nism

Megan Gerrett

Definition: women should have equal rights to men

I’m not a radical monster; that’s not how it’s meant

A “known feminist,” as though it’s a crime challenging society, and standing against false advertisement

Feminist
it’s a nice word; let’s all put our hands up because thirty years ago, things were different and yet, much the same

Let’s end the suspicion; I’m not against you
I’m with you, for you and equality, diversity

I know that we are strong and I hope we will persist in case you want to know, yes I’m a feminist.
This November air
Is made of soliloquies
Along Dundas Street

— Jennifer Zhang

**Take-aways**
Roy Geiger

She said one tough mother said an idle day, a waste
She said a magnifying glass shows the beating heart right through the shell of a snail, anyway
She said all her dreams are still in the house where she grew up
He said criminal secrets will out we are born knowing right from wrong he said
He said fiction almost hides the secrets spelled out in nonfiction
He said story is a dream state
She said fiction is one big book her life story over and over again

**Friday Night Festival Pulse**
Marilyn Ashworth

Chatter, a sea of rolling words from people in:
bow ties, suit ties, jackets, jeans, sweaters, scarves, necklaces, skirts, caps, slacks, poppies, Movember 'staches, cotton blends, colour clashes, ladies, gentlemen, bald, crop, mop, troupe?
video cameras, cell phones surfing, hugs, laughter, pointing finger, whispers, note jotting
mic testing, last minute preparations, questions, answers?

old friends, introductions, young, old, exclusive, inclusive, Zolf greeting, noise fading

**Haikus From a Street Corner**
Jennifer Zhang

This November air
Is made of soliloquies
Along Dundas Street

Though our feet wobble
Atop overturned milk crates
Our voices do not

Boldly spoken truths
Shake the heart of the city
Inspire the rest

**a pointwise stroll (amongst the stars)**
Helen Ngo

tonight, i walk to the edge and dare to look not down, but up
and i find that i have come further than i could fathom
so tonight i find myself contemplating the world in polar time
hanging on a horizon lit by the measure of a parameter
“an Other - silent
like a foot
in the boot of white boys
who speak History”
— R.A. Robinson

just beyond the reach of our
comprehension—
comprehension in all of its finite, curious
glory.

and as iron sharpens iron, so we will too
as we tumble through this rabbit hole of
wonder
vast enough to hold the universe in its pocket
(and then some, because who measures the
infinite?)
a universe so big i could never pinpoint the
north star—
the one guiding all of our (extra)ordinary
hearts.

chemical imbalance, in (way, way over) my
head
sparking obvious midnight chances set
against a backdrop
of telescoping ideas in n-dimensional space
space that could not be contained by the
greatest atlas
space containing the lion-shaped
constellations of our souls
and the thunderous hummingbird-song of our
heartbeats.

A landmark jutting prominently from the
linoleum expanse
John Malik

A landmark jutting prominently from the
linoleum expanse;
sweet, crisp, and warm.
The architects began to plan;
the builders began to build.
Crumbs and stones and hair;
the elbow grease of a thousand workers’ six
thousand limbs.
“A home,” they said.
Deposits of blue succulence, lakes of sultry
resin.
When it was finished, it was enjoyed.
The colony was united in a vivid sense of
purpose.
“For generations to come,” they said.

Unborn Not Here
R.A. Robinson

Last night, he spoke of Steve Biko
standing before a small crowd of white boys
ribs-split, sitting with mouths wider than
specks of spit
suspended and pass books spread like legs of
black mothers
flapping to fly from homes
soaked in Soweto Riot scares - another black
born -
another - unborn -
an Other - silent
like a foot
in the boot of white boys
who speak History,
meeting Steve Biko
unlike nameless, rib-punctured unborns.
“A landmark jutting prominently from the linoleum expanse”

—John Malik

A yawn and a half open eye
spots a tasty treat.
Whiskers bristle as the workers bustle
underneath;
the shadow encompasses, engulfs.
The feline enjoys a breakfast snack.
Writing in Snow
Martin Hayter

I write in sky blue ink: 
march my words 
between the lines, overcast, 
paging what comes to mind 
amid a chaos of slow 
soft bombing that tries 
to whiteout my rhymes, 
rhymes that also lay claim 
to this page where both, 
in silence, have a war 
to wage with silence.

Anna Behind Bars
(imagining Anna Akhmatova)
Martin Hayter

Naked, she scratches poems 
with a splinter from a bedpost 
on a bar of soap and rubs them 
into her skin, into memory, 
and, as she comes clean slowly, 
the words wear down, fading, 
leaving a white slate as clean 
as her body the guards inspect 
each day for contraband, as she 
razes their suspicions once 
more, with her silent smile, dry 
as ink, a withering critique.

In hollow streets
Joan Clayton

In hollow streets the poets flow 
Between the pillars row on row 
That mark our place while in the sky 
The word gods blinding writing cry 
Scarce heard amid the drone below 

Guerilla, a member of an irregular armed 
force that 
fights an organized group 

Or a large hairy animal

Words wordy a wordy play on words

If you do not feel this love of words pulling 
you like a river 
If you do not feel this pull 
Then sleep on, sleep for those of us who do 

We are the bards short days ago 
We wrote in cloistered cells felt fear 
For those who weep and now we write 
On city walls step up the pace 

The poet hears silence, finds eternity in a 
single word 
Enteres by the front door, the back door and 
the chimney 

A gorilla eats a lot of bananas and is 
preverbal
Take up our quarrel with the foe
To you with trembling hands we throw
The pen; be yours to hold it high if ye break faith
With those who march we shall not sleep
As poets flow in hollow streets

A wordy play on words, Bring Your Own Guerilla/Gorilla suit . . .

plastic blossom
Shelly Harder

in backyard suburbia
squirrels frenzy in shrubbery
leaves scrap
with the last scraps of a bag
captured in a tree

other bits of wrapping
lie with the leaves mulching the beds
a sterile coupling

not so this deck near Sparta
where winged symphonies strut

where, buried in birdsong
morning forgets the honk of busses
and the stampeding feet
the faces furrowed too soon

rather, to languor in the sun
and quite forget what they on branches
and on water have never known

here where bags have never stabbed the air
where fast food wrapping have not slouched
where sirens have not stormed to quell a beating

but I return, oh city, city
and your leaves are dancing with the plastic
let loose to bloom and wither before the sun

Poem: A Forgotten Library (remembered only at exam time)
Sara Raza

Crammed identical square desks are packed like sardines,
surrounded by tall towering shelves crowded with volumes of novels.
Thousands.

Air reeks of fresh print on paper mixed with a tang of acidity and the scent of grass.

Worn walls are only decorated with cracks and stains.
Lights are dim, illuminating only the corners within.
Wastebasket is overflowing with crumpled paper, lost ideas, incomplete thoughts.

A comfortable silence…
that is only broken with occasional deep exhales and pregnant sighs.
Teenagers are wrapped in a corner engulfed
in textbooks.
Bulging backpacks bulking with belongings
weighing down poor backs as they earlier
walked class to class.

Their growling stomachs begin pleading as they write…
They turn to glare at the sign hung at the
snack bar,
and the big red letters glare back, “closed.”

Faces pained with concentration. Eyes
drooping heavily.
Hands stained with ink. Heads burdening their necks.
While sitting on this rigid torturous chair,
their thoughts skip to escape as
they dream about soft pillows with memory foam that tailor to their carefully crafted backbones.

Meaningless noise as the microphone turns on –
“closing time”.
Desperate teenagers leap out of their stations as
smiles break open as they exit.
Sweet home.

Then I Saw the Vatican
Stan Burfield

All of us mistook it for some sort of Heaven.

We paid our fees and streamed in,
and by the thousands poured down the heavenly halls,
glimpsing, above the churning river of our bodies,
gold, enthroned Madonnas done in oils,
frescos of classical motifs, with cherubs looking on,
Popes in robes, surrounded by angels,
all proclaimed under high arches held aloft by Roman columns,
each inch worked to the highest art, but we were always pushed on,
our tour guides somewhere calling,
and if I could just stop and absorb all this
I might think of a prayer or at least a good thought. But no,
under that grand girth of power and glory we were ground down like polished stones.

Then I discovered this small painting
by a little-known artist named Crespi
in the old, neglected Castle Saint Angelo.

Alone, in a silent inner room,
I stood for a long time,
just inches from the face
of a man worshipped for two millennia,
ever since the long moment of horror
he was living through
there in front of me.

I was held by his unhurried eyes.
They accepted
the armoured brute
who was forcing him forward
amid splashes of blood-red spray
into the room
I was in.

But they’re caught and burned
like wild dogs, their noses everywhere,
jabbing for more.
The poets run
such a world, their giant fingers of smoke.

Just imagine the flames crowning
and you can hear sinister voices.
They say, Play poetry backward.

Who praises silence?
Jennifer Chesnut

Who praises silence, who praises the air?
The moon held between heaven and earth by
an invisible hand
The river rubbing her body on the bank
The cat captivated at the window
The bird popping up beak first at daylight
The body in sleep, the head on the pillow
The lovers rocking in and out of the night
Who praises silence, who praises the moon?
Martin Luther King begged the pause to open
people’s vision
Gandhi held fierce to the quiet path to reclaim
a nation
Aung San Suu Kyi went present into house
arrest
and years later returned the same
Maude Barlow’s words struck like lightning
into silence, into certainty
Before the alarm sounds, before the gates
close, silence enters
Her magnetic fingers pull us into a new room
“Before the alarm sounds, before the gates close, silence enters”

— Jennifer Chesnut

What will she say next in the space where no one is speaking
What will she beckon forth from you, and soon?
Sun setting over Tibet
Baby’s first breath
Last leaf falling before the full freeze
Who praises silence?
On these loud shores, who praises the moon?
Heterogeneities and Rhinos

Palms as Poems
Jayme Archibald

I like to think of my palms as poems or perhaps, my poems as palms as I hold them both, hands up in offering begging for you to take them by the handfuls grasping them with your own poems, palms palms, poems I blow them in kisses so another may hold them gripless letting them slip to the sky fingerpainting the framework that pillars the planet presented in feather light poems, palms palms, poems I breathe them in doses healing myself in the powdered pressure of poems, palms palms, poems to my wounds, cleansing and mending in the touch of words, these poems, palms palms, poems in offering, as I hold them both for you to kiss and breathe and mend as well

Heavy Metal Rhino
Andy McGuire

A protagonist of five o’clock light, I hear rumours of November, the Norway of the year, all my puny wounds dressed for the weather.

rail trail ride
Marlene Laplante

riding on the line sunlight filters through the trees each pedal seems in time with the past or the clatter of a ghost train on the track wheels turning capture feeling, momentum connecting past to present in a haunting way this quiet nostalgic trail ride opens some very special memories rare privileged moments of a most thrilling time when tons of metal moved through remote areas brought people together – grew a country you never forget the trains... childhood memory won’t let you steam whistles – bells ringing – engines puffing bellowing billows of black smoke the fascination never ends
past neighbours
who keep to themselves
fatten themselves with grudges
are not who you think.

—Miriam Love

as I cycle round a curve on this preserved path
my journey parallels iron rides of a hundred years
through villages and towns along the way
I can still see the children waving
hear the train’s whistle answer back

at journey’s end
I roll into the end of an era
rest my wheels and reflect back
on the great ride it was

The rhino runs
along the gray folds
of the 401
past small towns
past neighbours
who keep to themselves
fatten themselves with grudges
are not who you think.

Now, a boy with thin cold hands follows, camera strapped
against hard breast:
catch the beast,
a probable tale
a possible tale
for a story without a father.

Dürer’s Rhinoceros –
all scales and cloven toes
heavy armour and horns—
her body at odds
with life itself,
could not run
like this rhino.

The boy runs faster
farther, after his image
above the fold
tracking grey-horns
and guile, lens
bouncing on chest
rubber soles slapping
hard on the pavement.

The Rhino Lounge
Tom Cull

The rhino lunges,
tin and steel,
at angles to itself.
The writers tighten
the circle, closing in,
the rhinoceros spins,
impales a Language poet –
he screams eeeeeee
and falls.
A phalanx of novella-ists
charge the armoured beast
bringing her down.
A journalist produces
a hacksaw from inside his trench coat. It is passed through the crowd, and the sound of sawing, bellowing, briefly turns the heads of Saturday commuters. The riven horn is held aloft, passed from hand to hand, doused with WD40, and sent to the smithy who melts it down to make mighty pens and so the sexy stories go.

“The writers tighten the circle, closing in, the rhinoceros spins” — Tom Cull
Contributors

Jayme Archibald: a spoken word poet who frequents the London Poetry Slam and recently traveled to Vancouver for the Canadian Individual Poetry Slam and Saskatoon for the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word.

Marilyn Ashworth: loves to write and learn; both are offered at WordsFest.

Frank Beltrano: an active member of the London Ontario poetry community.

Stan Burfield: Organizer of London Open Mic Poetry Night.

Heidi Choi: a third-year English Literature student at Western University, and aspires to make a living one day from publishing my brain juice.

Joan Clayton: Playwright, historical fiction, POETRY QUEEN.

Tom Cull: lives and writes in London Ontario.

Roy Geiger: lives in London, and is a lifelong, avid reader.

Megan Gerrett: Peace and Love.

Laurie Graham: a poet and a teacher at Fanshawe.

Shelly Harder: “Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse... Almost, at times, the Fool.”

Martin Hayter: a full-time psychotherapist and part-time poet.

Aileen House: Woman in need of reminders found them.

Marlene Laplante: a great grandmother.

Miriam Love: lives in London Ontario, and teaches at King’s University College and Western University.

John Malik: Mathematics PhD, Musician.

Lincoln McCardle: a father, husband, interpretive dancer and proud Londoner.

Andy McGuire is poet and musician from Grand Bend, Ontario, and currently resides in Toronto. He is pursuing an MFA in creative writing from the University of Guelph. McGuire’s poems have appeared in Riddle Fence, Hazlitt and The Walrus.

Helen Ngo: addicted to cats, coffee, and calculus.

Zoe Norman: a lion tamer-cum- university student.

Ola Nowosad: a poet, teacher and member of Poetry London.
Contributors

Sara Raza: an avid poetry and start-up enthusiast studying Economics at Western University.

R.A. Robinson: a 4th year English Major at Western with aspirations to work for the CBC.

Christopher Scott lives in London, where he is a practicing artist and has worked as an installation consultant and a lecturer. His works have been exhibited in galleries across Ontario.

Stefanie Tom: 18-year-old foreigner who likes to sing.


Kym Wolfe: a freelancer who writes for a variety of magazines, I now have two books in print (Barhopping Into History London, Ontario and Hopping Into History, London).

Jennifer Zhang: a medical sciences major with an affinity for poetry.
This November air
Is made of soliloquies
Along Dundas Street

— Jennifer Zhang

Acknowledgements
An ambitious project of this nature could not have happened without a lot of coordinating efforts. WordsFestZine would like to thank all of the WordsFest organizers, and in particular, Josh Lambier, of the Public Humanities Program at Western, and Brian Meehan, of Museum London. We would also like to thank the London Public Library for printing and distributing our promotional materials, and Kathleen Fraser, of Western’s English and Writing Studies, for facilitating student and faculty involvement in this project. Finally, to all of those who submitted their creative works for this Zine: thank you!

Cover artwork: untitled by Christopher Scott.